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SUBJECT: GAMBARI ADMITS NO PROGRESS IN BURMA BUT CALLS FOR
PATIENCE

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11. (SBU) Summary: In both the Group of Friends meeting and during his briefing to the Security Council on March 18, UN Special Adviser Gambari admitted that his recent visit to Burma did not result in "an immediate, tangible outcome" but reported that the Burmese regime, Aung Sun Suu Kyi (ASSK), Secretary-General Ban, and the neighbors have all told him

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that his mission is "as relevant as ever." Gambari called for patience and reminded the Friends and the Council that the good offices process is subject to ups and downs. He noted that two years ago there was no dialogue with the regime and that 2010 elections would be the first general election in 20 years. He urged the regime, however, to engage in a meaningful dialogue with ASSK without delay. In an earlier meeting with the Group of Friends, Gambari floated the Indonesian idea of establishing a small "subgroup" of regional countries to discuss Burma informally, which was rejected by China and India. Gambari also suggested that he would meet with Burmese authorities in a third country to press for progress between visits to Burma, which was received positively.

12. (SBU) Summary cont.: During the portion of the Security Council briefing open to member states, Burmese PermRep Swe claimed that the referendum would be "free and fair" and all would be welcome to participate on equal terms, including the opposition. In closed discussion between Council members and Gambari that followed, Chinese PR Wang repeated the Chinese position urging international support for the admittedly imperfect Seven Step Roadmap and expressing opposition to sanctions. Ambassador Khalilzad recalled the October 11 Presidential Statement (PRST), observing that the Burmese regime had not responded to the concerns of the international community outlined in the PRST and concluding that Gambari's recent visit, which was "particularly disappointing," had also failed to generate concrete action. He pressed the Council to focus sharply on the referendum and adopt a PRST calling for an election process that meets international standards and contributes to a more inclusive political process. The rest of the Council split on predictable lines, with the Europeans criticizing the failed visit and the Asians calling for patience and recognizing progress. France, UK, Indonesia, Belgium, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Italy, Croatia and Russia agreed to work on a PRST as outlined by Ambassador Khalilzad. Indonesian PR Natalegawa cautioned that the Council should speak with one voice and Russian PR Churkin alleged that a PRST focused on a constitutional referendum might not be an appropriate topic

for the Council.

GAMBARI

13. (SBU) In both the Group of Friends meeting and the Council briefing held March 18, Special Adviser Gambari admitted that there was no immediate outcome from his recent visit to Burma. He characterized the regime's willingness to allow him to visit Burma early and extend his visit by one day as major concessions. He also asserted that the regime had taken "bold steps" in establishing a timeline for the referendum and elections. Gambari said that he offered UN technical assistance and strongly suggested independent monitors for the referendum to enhance its credibility. While the regime did not accept his offer, he reported that they assured him the referendum would be "free and fair." Gambari also obtained a copy of the draft constitution, in Burmese, and said that the regime planned to publish the document "soon." Gambari conveyed the regime's unwillingness to consider the establishment of an economic forum to address the root causes for discontent in Burma until sanctions are lifted. Regarding engagement with the regime, Gambari noted that the UN, via his good offices mission, is the only "outsider" to maintain access to ASSK and the regime and is the preferred interlocutor of the international community and the region. He assured the Friends and Council members that the regime, ASSK, SYG Ban and the neighbors all agree that engagement with the regime through his good offices mission is as "relevant as ever."

14. (SBU) During the Group of Friends meeting, Gambari suggested that he would meet with senior Burmese government officials in a third country between his visits to Burma. Gambari speculated that such meetings could potentially encourage more substantive dialogue with the regime. He also

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floated the idea of a smaller, "subgroup" on Burma comprised of key regional countries. He proposed that the group could hold informal discussions in the region and that he would report these discussions to the UN. While the majority of friends were supportive of third country meetings with senior Burmese authorities, China and India rejected Gambari's proposal for a "subgroup" on Burma, noting that there were already enough groups handling the issue.

BURMA

15. (SBU) Addressing the Security Council, Burmese PR Swe expressed "appreciation and admiration" for Gambari and the "principled manner" in which he implements the good offices mandate. Swe asked that the Council take a broad view or progress in Burma, noting that the regime is nearly on step four of the Seven Step Roadmap, a process that they initiated in 2003. He was "gratified" that neighbors who saw the situation for "what it was" highlighted the progress made during Gambari's recent visit. Swe claimed that the NLD participated in the National Convention when it drafted three chapters of "fundamental principles." The group would not participate when the Convention reconvened in 2004, he said. Swe stressed the inclusive nature of the Convention and the referendum process and said that the "Spokesperson Team" assured Gambari during his visit that the referendum would be "free and fair." He stated "in the referendum as well as in the elections, everyone - those who support the Government and those who oppose its policies - will be allowed to participate on equal terms." He reiterated that cooperation with the UN is a cornerstone of Burmese policy and reminded the Council that the situation was not a threat to international peace and security. He concluded by announcing that no Security Council action was warranted.

ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

16. (SBU) In both meetings, the Chinese invoked SYG Ban's

statement that some progress had been made, focusing on Gambari's ability to visit Burma earlier than planned and extend his visit by one day. They also listed those with whom he met, emphasizing that he met twice with ASSK. Chinese PR Wang said that the Seven Step Roadmap demonstrated Burmese commitment to democratization and is the result of years of discussion. He added that lack of inclusion in the process thus far could be addressed through expanded dialogue. The Chinese reiterated their position that the international community must be patient with Burma and create an "enabling" environment. The Chinese cautioned Friends and Council members to avoid sanctions, which Wang argued only provoke the regime and could damage the dialogue process. Vietnam and Indonesia echoed China's view. Vietnamese PR Minh also highlighted the complexity of the situation in Burma, reaffirming its support for a comprehensive approach that respects Burma's sovereignty. Indonesian PR Natalegawa urged the Council to avoid oversimplifying Gambari's visit by characterizing it as a "success" or "failure" and suggested that the Council should not "overplay" Gambari's inability to meet with senior Burmese authorities, specifically Than Shwe.

17. (SBU) Among Asian countries in the Group of Friends, only the Japanese remarked that Gambari's recent visit was a disappointment and questioned whether Burma's engagement was a pretext for doing nothing. India and Thailand followed China's lead in stressing that progress would be incremental and emphasizing the importance of a pragmatic, patient approach. Thai PR Pramudwinai claimed to know Burma better than most members of the group owing to a history of "fighting the Burmese for the past 100 years." He advocated a "softer approach," and encouraged Friends to invite Burmese authorities to visit their countries and expose them to the outside world. Singapore repeated Burma's request to ASEAN that the UN not ASEAN serve as the link between the regime and the international community. (Note: During the meeting, Gambari introduced the Republic of Korea as a new member of the group.)

U.S. AND LIKE-MINDED

18. (SBU) In both meetings Ambassador Khalilzad recalled the October 11 PRST concerns in detail and concluded that the regime had failed to take concrete action on any of these

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issues; in this regard, Gambari's most recent visit was particularly disappointing. Ambassador Khalilzad reiterated support for Gambari but cautioned that the good offices mission process must yield results. The question for the Council is what can we do to help Gambari's mission be results-oriented? He pointed to the referendum on the constitution as the next milestone. Noting the regime's unwillingness to accept technical assistance from the UN, he urged the Council to focus sharply on the referendum and adopt a PRST that calls for a credible referendum that contributes to more inclusive political process. Ambassador Khalilzad previewed reftel points and remarked that Gambari's ability to be effective in his good offices role depends in part on the Security Council providing him the necessary support.

19. (SBU) Among Council delegations, France, UK, Belgium, Italy, Croatia, Costa Rica and Burkina Faso also criticized the lack of progress in Burma and characterized Gambari's recent visit as disappointing. UK PR Sawers also stressed the need to release ASSK in order for the referendum process to be credible. He highlighted flaws in the constitution, which, according to Sawers, included a provision for the military to suspend the constitution. Sawers added that if the regime follows through with the referendum, the UK would judge the process by international standards. Burkina Faso PR Kafando "deplored" Gambari's inability to meet with senior members of the regime and called for rectification of provisions that limit ASSK's participation in the process.

¶10. (SBU) Responding to Amb Khalilzad's call for a PRST, Italy cautioned that only a unified message from the Council could be effective. France, UK, Belgium, Italy, Burkina Faso, and Croatia all expressed support for a PRST with a strong focus on an inclusive referendum. Indonesia supported the proposal for a PRST but cautioned that the Council needed to speak with one voice and avoid a divisive exercise.

¶11. (SBU) During the Group of Friends meeting, EU Special Envoy for Myanmar Fassino spoke on behalf of the EU. Fassino suggested that raising the level of ASSK's government liaison is a critical step in the process toward reconciliation in Burma. He also agreed that the international community must press the regime to set criteria for the referendum that reflect international standards and norms. He pledged EU support for Gambari and his good offices mission and remarked that ASEAN and neighboring countries could play a vital role in Burma. Norway and Australia reiterated their support for the good offices process, stressing that dialogue is the key to reconciliation in Burma. Australia called for concrete progress between now and the referendum, suggesting that focusing on Gambari's proposed National Economic Forum could be beneficial.

RUSSIA, LIBYA, PANAMA AND SOUTH AFRICA

¶12. (SBU) Russia acknowledged that Gambari's recent visit was a disappointment but stressed that the international community should not underestimate the upcoming referendum. Russian PR Churkin expressed support for an inclusive referendum but also remarked that both sides must be ready to make concessions in order to establish an inclusive national dialogue. While Russia stated its willingness to engage on a PRST, Churkin expressed concern with a statement that focused on constitutional referendum, which he alleged was not an appropriate role for the Council. Libyan PR Ettalhi commented that the dialogue is taking root and that Libya hopes the referendum will be a turning point in Burma. He cautioned, however, that the international community should not interfere in the internal affairs of another country.

¶13. (SBU) Panamanian PR Arias called into question the constitution as a step forward, remarking that the constitution and the process by which it was adopted was "autocratic," not democratic. Arias characterized regime actions as inadequate and called on the international community to pressure the regime to democratize its institutions and respect human rights. The South African DPR stated that only national dialogue would resolve the situation in Burma, and said South Africa would be willing to work on a PRST.
KHALILZAD